



Popular Tradition

*Balloons for Saint Michael the Archangel,
San Miguel Petapa,
Guatemala*

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Introduction:

In the town of San Miguel Petapa, capital of the municipality of Petapa in the department of Guatemala, located 23 kilometers south of Guatemala City, the tradition of releasing paper balloons at the town's patron saint festival, held on September 29 in honor of Saint Michael the Archangel, the patron saint of the town, still survives.

In the town This tradition is carried out by the Molina Santos family and has been a tradition for several generations of the Molina family, as a patrilineal inheritance. The Molina family only makes the balloons for the San Miguel Arcángel fair in September each year. They start making them in August so that they are ready for the fair and only make the number of balloons needed for the occasion. They do not make a profit from the sale of the balloons because, for them, making and releasing the balloons is a ceremonial activity that they carry out as a gift to the patron saint, which is why it is very important for the Center for Folkloric Studies of the University of San Carlos of Guatemala to carry out a study of this artisan tradition, with the aim of getting to know its bearers, the techniques for making the paper balloons and contributing to the conservation and dissemination of this tradition of the municipality of Petapa.

Historical summary of the town of Petapa

San Miguel Petapa is a town with a long historical tradition. Its origins date back to pre-Hispanic times, with evidence of settlements in the region dating back to over 1,000 years BC, in towns that

were settled in small villages of Poqomam origin. In the late post-classic period the population increased in the region, partly as a result of the expansion into the central highlands of groups of K'iche' origin. The name of the region in Poqomam was Popayá, which means "place of the mats" and, on the arrival of the Spanish conquerors, it was given the name Petapa, with the same meaning in the Nahuatl language.

According to Fuentes and Guzmán, cited by Chajón (2007: 86), at the time of the conquest the Petapa region was governed by a Pocomam indigenous chief called Caz Hualam, who formed an alliance with the Spanish conquerors, which is why the Spanish took control of the Petapa region from the outset. It was one of the first settlements to submit to the Spanish Crown, giving rise to the settlement in order to be able to exercise better control over the indigenous population.

On October 9, 1762, as a result of heavy rains caused by a storm, the Tuluján and Petapa (Villalobos) rivers overflowed, flooding the town of San Miguel Petapa, which was buried under mud, causing many casualties among the inhabitants and travelers. Because of this flood, called the Flood of San Dionisio, the ethnic and economic contradictions of the inhabitants caused a conflict in the society of Petapá that forced the population to move, dividing into two towns. The Spaniards and mestizos founded

The population of Concepción de Villa Nueva and the Petapaneco indigenous people moved the population of San Miguel Petapa to a site located between the Horca valley and the Majada plain, next to the banks of the Platanitos river, where the population again suffered damage as a result of the earthquake of September 4 and 5, 1783, which caused the ruin of the Catholic temple. The church was rebuilt and inaugurated in 1802, and a water tank was also incorporated into the square to mitigate the water crises that had been experienced since its relocation to that site. It was not only water shortages and earthquakes that devastated Petapa at the time of its relocation, a smallpox epidemic decimated the population and there was also a loss of vegetable garden production due to a plague of locusts. Due to the economic crisis caused by the loss of crops, the new town had to be built by leasing communal land, which led to attempts to appropriate these lands, as well as the introduction of cattle and other livestock where the farmland was located (González, 2006: 52) which damaged the economic base of the town that depended on the role of food supplier.

Furthermore, in the period between 1783 and 1830, the latter date being when the town was once again destroyed by an earthquake, it suffered several floods of the Platanitos river. There were also three major fires that could not be extinguished due to the lack of water in the town, causing great losses to the vegetable gardens, a circumstance that impoverished its inhabitants who, at that time, according to González (2006: 51), were mostly mestizo.

In April 1830, the Petapa region was shaken by a series of earthquakes until, on the 23rd of that same month, an earthquake destroyed the town of San Miguel Petapa, leaving its inhabitants in a deplorable situation. They therefore began to move to the Horca Valley, land that was owned by Mrs. María Manuela Arrivillaga, who claimed

her land and asked to be paid for the land she occupied, thus entering into litigation with the municipal authorities. On November 21, 1831, after the problem with Mrs. Arrivillaga was resolved, the authorities ordered the population of San Miguel Petapa to move to Valle de la Horca, formally beginning the construction of the new Catholic temple and the introduction of drinking water to the town.

According to González (2006: 61), due to the economic crisis suffered by the town since its relocation in 1763, its consolidation was delayed until 1855 with the construction of its new Catholic church and in 1866 the cross that is currently in the town square was placed.

The Catholic church was later destroyed by the earthquakes of 1917 and 1918 and rebuilt in the 1960s (Chajón, 2007: 94). In 2006, construction began on the current temple, the cost of which exceeds five million quetzals. The money was raised through offerings from the Catholic residents of San Miguel Petapa, both Petapanecos and people from other places who reside in that municipality, plus a contribution from the local municipality.

In summary, San Miguel Petapa was very important economically until 1762 when it was destroyed by a storm. As a place of passage to the eastern region of Guatemala and Central America, it was home to the priest Thomas Gage, who wrote a travel chronicle describing his passage through Mexico and Central America in which he recounts his stay in the town. Another distinguished resident of Petapa was Santo Hermano Pedro de Betancourt and it was precisely in this town where, praying to the Virgin of the Rosary, he received the revelation to return to the City of Santiago and dedicate his life to caring for the poor. Its religious importance was relevant, both in the parish of Spaniards and Mestizos, as well as in that of the indigenous people.

Evangelization in the ancient town of Petapa was the responsibility of the Dominican fathers in the parish of San Miguel Arcángel for the indigenous population and of the Spanish for the parish of the Immaculate Conception. Ladinos, mulattos and people of African descent

The parish church of the Immaculate Conception possessed valuable treasures from the colonial era, such as altarpieces, paintings and images, and due to the importance of the parish, these were of the highest quality. They were transferred to the parish church of Villa Nueva after the flood of 1762.

Before the flood that destroyed it, Petapa had religious brotherhoods, which were: Jesus of Nazareth, the Blood of Christ, of the Patriarch Saint Joseph, of the Souls, the Immaculate Conception, Our Lady of Sorrows and the Blessed Sacrament. Currently there are no brotherhoods in the town of Petapa and what functions outside of the traditional parish organizations is a religious committee whose members organize the processions and other religious activities.

As for the ancient images that exist in Petapa, the Virgen del Rosario is venerated, which according to tradition was the image that revealed to the Holy Brother Pedro what his vocation was, and the Buried Lord of Petapa, known as Cristo de la Penitencia and which according to tradition has been venerated for more than 400 years, as well as the patron saint San Miguel Arcángel. These devotions have been maintained among the people of Petapa to this day and, at present, the municipality of Petapa is one of the municipalities with the greatest economic development in the south of the department of Guatemala, with industrial areas and a great urban expansion.

What is a balloon?

A balloon is a type of aerostat that allows you to ascend and move through the air. It does not fly, but rather floats on the wind. It rises because warm air weighs less than cold air, thus tending

It rises, and floats within the air mass, at the mercy of the wind currents that carry it in one direction or another. Balloons are made up of three parts: the envelope, the nozzle and the burners.

It is recorded that, in August 1709, the Brazilian priest Bartolomeu de Gusmão gave the first demonstration of aerial ascension in an unmanned hot air balloon at the Casa de Indias in Lisbon, before the court of King John V of Portugal.

The brothers Joseph and Jacques Montgolfier made the first hot air balloon for transportation (and probably for military purposes) in November 1782. The Montgolfier brothers, one of whom was a paper manufacturer in the French city of Avignon, observed that smoke from the chimney raised particles in the air, a phenomenon they attributed to the electric air that, according to beliefs of the time, also "sustained the clouds". They constructed a silk bag of just under one cubic meter which, when filled with hot air, rose to the ceiling of the room where they were conducting the experiment. The first flight, with a duck, a rooster and a sheep as passengers, took place on December 14th of the same year. It was a success because the animals came down alive. The following year they made a presentation to the King of France (Molina, 2005: 191-223). In the 19th century, balloons became a public attraction and flights with passengers were carried out.

History of the Molina Santos family

The aim of this work is to publicize the artistic work of Juan Molina Tatuaca, now deceased, a prominent artisan and pioneer in the production of paper balloons, from the municipality of San Miguel Petapa, who from childhood learned the trade of making true works of art with Chinese paper, as well as Doña Angelina Molina Santos, daughter of the artisan who learned and continued the tradition of making Chinese paper balloons to honor the patron saint, Saint Michael the Archangel.

It is precisely the fact that Don Juan Molina Tatuaca, the only son who inherited the craft of making balloons in San Miguel Petapa from his grandfather and his father, and who later inherited it to his daughter Doña Angelina, that this tradition justifies this biographical study, because it allows us to learn, in addition to his life full of anecdotes, the artisanal processes of making the famous balloons of San Miguel Petapa. Below is the story of the Molina Santos family, provided by Mrs. Angelina, who continued the tradition. In this way, it will allow us to learn about the preparations, the process of cutting, making and donating the paper balloons as an offering to the patron saint, Saint Michael the Archangel.

The family

Don Juan Molina Tatuaca was born in San Miguel Petapa, a municipality of Guatemala, in 1911. He died at the age of 98 and, if he were alive, he would be 100 years old. He and his wife, Felícita Mercedes Santos de Molina, who died 44 years ago, had four children: three daughters and a son. His mother did not learn to make balloons, nor did his children, because Don Juan did not teach them as he did not like to be disturbed when he was working on them. When his father made the balloons he was untouchable. We could only say to him: "Lunch is ready" and he would go out to eat and then come back again to continue with the balloons.

When it was his turn to stick the strips together to form the balloon, he did it on his knees on the floor. But the floor has the disadvantage that the glue, in this case yuquilla, gets dirty if there is air and raises dust. You can work on the floor but it is very tiring. Over time, Don Juan opted to make them on a table, which meant that he had to work standing up and this caused inflammation in his feet and general fatigue from spending four hours on his feet. According to the informant, the tradition of balloons in the town of San Miguel Petapa has been passed down from generation to generation on the paternal side, as his father was taught by his grandfather Don Juan.

Molina Sanabria and, to his grandfather, his great-grandfather, whose name he does not remember. Therefore, according to Doña Angelina, the tradition of balloons in the town has been passed down in the family for more than 200 years and they were and are only made for the town fair and they are released on September 29th, the day of the patron saint, as an offering from the family to honor him on his big day. His father told him that in the past, at the village fair, there were no rides or fairground attractions, only purely religious activities, so the release of balloons was a spectacle that impressed and moved parishioners and the general public.

Doña Angelina always asked her father: What do you feel when the balloon rises? And his father would reply: Look, my daughter, it's like talking to the Lord. When the balloon reaches its height, I feel it is a message to our Lord in gratitude for all that he has given us during the year: life, health and the harvest. His father, as well as being a farmer, was a teacher in the village and for him, sending up a balloon was like a direct line to give thanks. That is the reason for the balloons: a tribute to the Lord on his saint's day. The Lord is the way in which Don Juan addressed Saint Michael the Archangel.

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Making a balloon is a very fine work, painstaking and laborious work. My dad really made them with great love. That offering was with a lot of sacrifice because after going back and forth on foot from Lake Amatitlán, where he spent all day working in the fields with the machete and hoe, arriving home at night to work on the balloons was a sacrifice. But he made them with pleasure because he said: it is my offering to the Lord.

Don Juan began to work on the balloons at the beginning of September and did not like to be interrupted for fear of making a mistake on the paper. However, the torrential rains that fell in September in those years, prevented him from advancing in the elaboration due to the humidity, the glues did not dry quickly. Time advanced and Don Juan entered at anguish because the 29th of September was almost September 29th, the day when the balloons were to be blown up and he had not yet finished what he had set out to offer to the patron saint. But, according to information from Doña Angelina, thanks to God she managed to finish even on the last day.

When the month of September arrived, I dedicated full days to full days to the elaboration of the balloons and neglected the chores in the fields, he did not go out anywhere because he was I didn't go out anywhere because I was completely immersed in working on the balloons because it is a very entertaining [painstaking] work. The balloons don Juan prepared were, according to the informant, large. A large balloon was made with 60 sheets of Chinese paper. He was very creative in the different shapes. For example: My dad would say, I'm going to make a little dove for San Miguel, that balloon was white. Or, if he didn't say, I'm going to make him a rose, then the balloon at the top was pink and fuchsia pink and fuchsia and the bottom was green. Or it would say, I made a and it was yellow with green and so on... and so on. and so on... My dad found a meaning to each balloon. meaning. Before offering the balloons, don Juan always used to go to the church always used to go to church, say a prayer to St. Michael the Archangel prayer to St. Michael the Archangel and offered the balloons. balloons. In his prayer he would say: Here is the gift from the family, what we have always given you.

Offered by San Miguel. And then they proceeded to inflate them and let them rise, an activity which was and is currently carried out in the inner corridor on the right side of the church. The reason why they were flown there was because Don Juan said that the balloons were for San Miguel and for that is why they could not fly at the park.

Angelina says that her father wanted to see how the balloons were to see what the balloons that were flown for the independence festivities in Quetzaltenango. One of his sons took him and Don Juan was able to appreciate that they were not of the magnitude of his own but were much smaller. And when he saw them flying, he said: "Those are not balloons! I make!"

Don Juan was a very generous farmer. He always shared with those who visited him the harvest; ayotes, beans or corn. But every person, friend or neighbor that visited his house, did not leave empty-handed. He would always tell them: He is going to take the relics of the town, and he would give them a bag with the produce of the harvest. With the balloons for San Miguel he was very generous, he made as many as he could because he was devoted to San Miguel. For a long time he was president of the religious committee and when he was asked to do him the favor of dressing him, it was an honor for Don Juan. He enjoyed making the balloons and dressing up St. Michael the Archangel because he was a man of great faith. And he never sold a balloon, he always offered them.

The balloons constitute the legacy, the inheritance that Don Juan left to his town, San Miguel Petapa. When he died, the people commented that they were no longer going to see balloons on September 29th because no one in town knew how to make them, except for his daughter Angelina.

Doña Angelina's Beginnings in the Art of Making Balloons

Ms. María Angelina Molina Santos is a retired professor for the past 12 years. She has a closed teaching curriculum in History and Social Sciences from the University of San Carlos. She is single and works full-time.

At the National Institute of Basic Education in the town, where she teaches the Social Studies course. In the afternoon, she devotes her time to her father's inheritance, and because of her father's memory, she takes great care of it. She loves flowers and, according to her, she is very homely. She is capable of staying up to a week without leaving the house because she always finds something to do.

It is because she always finds something to do. She is the captain of the perpetual adoration of Jesus Sacrament of the chapel that was established on October 25, 2009, inside the parish church. She does adoration from 6:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. on Fridays. According to her, she chose Fridays because her father, Don Juan Molina, died on a Friday at 6:00 p.m., and at that time of adoration, she asks for the eternal rest of her father's soul.

In response to the neighbors' comment about the end of the balloons after Don Juan's death, Doña Angelina said to her family: for me, the inheritance that my dad left to the town, that legacy of the family, is going to continue because I already know how to make the balloons.

Doña Angelina said she will keep the tradition of the balloons to keep alive the memory of her father's memory, and asked her family members to help in the making of the balloons because, due to her lack of skills, she could not do it alone and therefore needed help. Doña Angelina recalls that the first year she had to make them, she went to the church to say the prayer that her father used to say to San Miguel. She offered him the balloons and asked for help to make them as her father did. And that year, as she reported, all the balloons rose, none of them burned, and this was like a testimony that St. Michael heard her prayer and encouraged her to continue the tradition, respect, faith, and devotion to San Miguel. Of Don Juan's family, only Doña Angelina makes balloons and indicated that her father taught her how to make them by remote control. The father never required them to learn. When the father worked on the balloons, he didn't ask for their help; he only invited them to come and watch.

Doña Angelina commented that when she had to do them alone, it was very difficult for her, especially because of the memories of her father, which she had to overcome in order not to cry. Her brother came to help her and told her the same thing that her father used to tell them when they were young, "come closer, then." But the brother could not stand the memory of their father, and it was up to Mrs. Angelina to elaborate them as her father did—alone—with the intention of perpetuating the name of Don Juan, who was a very humble, very simple man, and to keep alive the tradition that was the work of his ancestors.

Doña Angelina, remembering the hardships her father suffered due to the weather conditions, decided to start making the balloons at the beginning of August. Her nephews told her if they could start in the month of July so as not to be tormented, but she says that it is not convenient because they can't be stored for a long time because of the humidity. She indicated that when she dedicates herself to the balloons, she does not go anywhere until she finishes them. In 2009, she had a problem when making the balloons because the sheet of Chinese paper was smaller and less wide, a situation that made her spend more time than usual because she had to make additions to get the size of the sheets she had left over from 2008. Each sheet she had to add strips of about 20 centimeters, which was very tiring and boring, as she was cutting and adding bits and pieces. To make the balloons, templates are not needed. Doña Angelina says that most people think they are made with stencils, and when asked about the mold, she answers that it is not needed; that it is on the same paper where the shape is given when the tracing and the cut are made.

Doña Angelina, unlike her father at the beginning, makes the balloons on the table. It's more comfortable, and if there is wind, it doesn't raise dust that sticks to the yuquilla. It takes a lot of patience to do this work, and it happens to her like Don Juan—her feet also swell up from standing. On one occasion, Doña Angelina

Doña Angelina found her father barefoot because the swelling of his feet was so bad that his shoes would not fit. Mrs. Angelina bought him another shoe of a larger size, but the same thing happened—his feet were so swollen that he could not wear them. Then Doña Angelina ordered him: "Papa, you're going to lie down, put your legs up and I'm going to make them because this is urgent." That is how Doña Angelina learned how to make the balloons, because of the urgency and the little time they had left for September 29th.

In the words of Mrs. Angelina: I learned to use the remote control because my dad was lying with his legs up indicating to me what I had to do. I followed all the instructions from my dad: "Pick it up, fold it, stick it" and that's how I learned. I learned when I was older, maybe I was about 50 or 55 years old because that's recent, now I am 66 years old. I didn't learn as a child because he didn't like it because he said that one would just end up making mistakes and tearing the paper.

On one occasion, Mrs. Angelina and her siblings entered the room where their father was working and, after talking for a few minutes, Mr. Juan came out very angry and told them: This is why I don't like you coming in when I am working because I made a mistake and cut it wrong. To avoid mistakes, Mr. Juan worked with the door closed. Mrs. Angelina recounts that her father checked that the balloons did not have any small slits to prevent air from escaping when it was lifted. Her father had a good eye for detecting which strip had a little hole and would indicate what to do, and she proceeded exactly as her father instructed.

Materials to make a balloon

Various colors of tissue paper (a ream)
Yuquilla or paste as glue
Lemon juice
Popsicle stick small one to stir the paste
Containers for the paste

Basket rod frame to form the mouth
of the balloon
Scissors
Smooth wooden ruler
Pen
Cotton rags for the wick
A long castilla stick without knots or splinters
(to hold the balloon)
Blowers
Torch made with old cotton rags
to light the wick
A green stick for the torch
Wooden hooks (for hanging clothes)
Gas canister
Kerosene
Matches
Strips of newspaper
Flexible binding wire to make the basket,
which serves to hold the wick
Hemp thread
A clean old rag
An apron
A large table
Pliers

Preparation of the material to make a balloon

Doña Angelina, like her father, chooses a day to buy paper and goes to the bookstore because in the stores, purchasing it has two problems: one, the paper is already folded and two, the sheet costs 0.35 cents. Buying the ream is cheaper and it provides the option to choose the colors and check that the paper is completely smooth, without wrinkles or folds to mark the crease that will serve as the guide for the balloon, because from the moment the paper is purchased.

The care of the balloon begins. The yuquilla or paste is prepared, which is cooked, lemon juice is added to prevent it from spoiling, and it must be smooth and manageable. The tissue paper to be used is prepared. In the case of Doña Angelina's balloons, 12 strips of tissue paper are needed to make a large balloon, which her father called strips. Before folding, cutting, and gluing, the paper must be checked to ensure everything is the same size, as a sheet of smaller size will cause issues when cutting and will require additions that take more time.

The smaller sheet is discarded, as it is the most time-consuming, tiring, and double work.

It is necessary to have scissors and a cloth at hand to remove the paste left on the fingers or wipe them on the apron to avoid staining the rest of the paper.

Artisanal process of a balloon

From the ream of 144 sheets of tissue paper, 5 sheets of different colors are chosen: green, red, fuchsia, yellow, purple, sky blue, orange. The important thing is to select the most cheerful colors so that the balloon looks nice and eye-catching. They can be made in two sizes: large and small. It starts with two sheets of tissue paper, folded in half lengthwise. It is necessary to firmly mark the fold line because it constitutes the spine or guide to follow for gluing. They are glued with paste, ensuring that the fold of the first sheet matches the fold of the other sheet. These two sheets will form the belly or belly of the balloon, which is the widest part. The third sheet of tissue paper is taken, folded lengthwise, cut, and one half is glued to the previous two, making the spines align. This piece will shape the mouth of the balloon.

Next, take another sheet of paper, fold it in half transversely, and glue it in the same transverse manner on the upper side, which will be the belly of the balloon. This trace

It will form the tip of the balloon. Finally, take the last sheet of paper, fold it into 4 parts, and take 1/4, which will be glued to the continuation of the part that will form the tip. This part will be called the very tip of the balloon, that is, the end. In this way, it is completed, and a full strip remains attached. It is important to know how to apply the paste, as it should always be placed on the smaller piece of paper first and then glued to the larger piece.

Doña Angelina says that the reason for applying the paste to the smallest piece is due to better handling of the paper. Each time one piece is glued to another, it is necessary to wait for it to dry well before continuing to apply paste to the other pieces. This way, it is avoided that one sticks to another. The procedure is repeated in the same manner until completing 12 strips that will be used to form a complete globe. The procedure of folding, cutting, and gluing is very tiring, as after two or even three hours of this task, the exhaustion is overwhelming since the work is done standing. Each strip is placed in an appropriate spot for drying. Doña Angelina lays the strips stretched out on dining room chairs, on the sofa, on the bed, and on any surface that allows the strips to dry without wrinkling. If there is sun, the drying is quick: in three or four hours. But if it is a rainy season, like September, they are left overnight to achieve complete drying.

When the strips are completely dry, the 12 strips are taken and folded in half, one by one, longitudinally, marking the fold well so that the stripes run along the length. Once they are folded, the first strip is taken and placed on the table, which is not large enough because of the size, and Doña Angelina has to place another small table to make up for the length of the strip. Then, she places the second strip over the first one, then the third, and so on until completing the 12, making sure that the strips are aligned, perfectly flush at the start, because this is the mouth part of the balloon. Without this care, the mouth

will become twisted, and when the balloon is raised, it twists and burns.

Doña Angelina uses clothespins to press them. On each clothespin, she places a small piece of paper to avoid damaging the tissue paper, and in this way, they are secured and do not move. Doña Angelina's father used small stones to hold the strips. The clothespins are placed along the strips in the part where they are folded, placing the first clothespin where what will become the opening begins. The 12 strips must be even at the bottom, although they may not match at the top where the balloon ends, because the excess can be trimmed. If the paste is completely dry, the paper has no issue because it slips easily and can be stacked on top of one another without any problem. If the paste is wet, then one piece sticks to another, and it is more difficult to stack them because the paper tears.

After the step of placing the strips is completed, it is checked once again to ensure that the paper is straight at the part that will be the opening. A smooth wooden ruler and the pen are taken. The ruler is placed over the strips, starting from the bottom, that is, from the opening of the balloon. Doña Angelina places four fingers of her hand or estimates six centimeters and makes a mark with the pen. Next, she places the ruler from that point and directs it diagonally until it reaches the first glue joint and draws a line. The part of the paper below the point, that is, the six centimeters, will be used to shape the opening, which must be reinforced with paper so that it is firm, allowing for the attachment of the basket legs made of wire that will hold the tow to be lit when it is elevated.

Then, the second line is drawn, starting from where the first line ends and reaching the next glue joint. The line is drawn, and it continues to be drawn from joint to joint until the end. The belly of the balloon is made by estimation, and thanks to doña Angelina's experience, calculating the belly poses no problem for her. A line is drawn that ends

to the center and then another that ends at the next stick it and the part that will become the belly of the balloon is formed.

When the tracing process is finished, cutting begins with scissors, carefully following the line without removing the clothespins because all 12 strips are being cut at the same time. Once the cutting process is completed, as Doña Angelina's father used to say, the blades remain because they end with a little point. The clothespins that were used to hold the strips of paper are removed, and the hand is passed longitudinally from top to bottom between each strip to ensure they are not stuck together. Then the 12 strips are taken, being careful not to let them shift, and their position is reversed, that is, they are turned over so that the first strip will end up on top. In this artisanal process, no molds or templates are used to form the strips.

The next step is to glue strip by strip until the balloon is closed. The strips always overlap one another. The bottom strip is taken, opened in half, and strips of newspaper are placed underneath to prevent one piece from sticking to the other when applying the paste. Once the bottom strip is opened, the second strip is taken, opened slightly, and placed on top of the first one, overlapping the edge like a small tab of approximately one centimeter. It is on this tab that paste is applied in sections, and the edge is folded over the second strip until finished. Several containers with paste are placed along the table, which makes the gluing process easier as it is within reach, and during this step, the material does not move but rather it is the artist who walks. At the same time, while applying the paste, the artist folds the edge until reaching the end, as these strips are between three and four meters long.

It continues in the same way with the third strip consecutively until the balloon closing process is completed. If more paste than necessary is applied, a small patch of

paper of the same color is placed to prevent it from sticking to the next blade and to avoid the paper tearing when the glue dries.

The apron is used to remove excess paste from the fingers when applying it and making the fold of the edge. When gluing, care must be taken to glue the edge well to ensure there are no openings that might cause air to escape when lifting it. Each time a strip is finished being glued, strips of newspaper are placed to prevent them from sticking to each other while the paste is wet. It is necessary to constantly run the hand from end to end underneath each piece to detach the tissue paper that has stuck to the newspaper.

If it is glued and already dry, it is preferable to leave the small piece of newspaper, which does not affect anything. Otherwise, if you try to remove it, the tissue paper tears, and a patch of the same color of paper must be placed over the hole. The function of the newspaper is to absorb the excess paste.

When the strips start being glued, the work cannot be left unfinished. What has been started must be completed by gluing until the balloon is closed. This is why it is a very exhausting task. On one occasion, Doña Angelina timed how long it took her to glue a strip, and it took 10 minutes, which means it takes two hours of standing during the process of gluing the twelve pieces.

The last step of sticking is closing the balloon. For this, all the strips of newspaper that have been used are removed, and the last part left loose from the twelfth strip is joined to the one that was left loose from the first strip at the beginning of sticking, proceeding in the same way as the previous ones were glued until the ends are joined. When all the additions are completely dry, the mouth of the balloon is formed. It is important that it is dry because otherwise the glue would come apart when placing the small basket ring made of Castilla cane, which will give firmness to the base of the balloon. The basket ring

It keeps wrapping with the six centimeters of tissue paper that were left outside the line that was made with the ruler at the beginning of the cut.

After rolling the paper, more paper is placed again to reinforce the opening and give rigidity to the mouth of the balloon, ensuring it remains level. Sometimes it happens that the ring is small and there is excess balloon mouth. To solve this problem, folds are made in the form of pleats to reduce the mouth and adjust it to the size of the ring. In the opposite case, if the mouth is smaller than the ring, it is cut and small strips of the same material and color are added to enlarge it and left to dry in order to place the ring. The same process is followed to reproduce another identical balloon, until completing the quantity offered to Saint Michael the Archangel.

The last step is to close the balloon at the upper end, which is done with hemp because it does not tear the delicate tissue paper. It is tied tightly because it must be very secure, as this part will serve as the support for the entire balloon once inflated. The excess is cut off after tying, and a small loop is made with the same hemp, which will be used to attach the stick for holding the balloon when raising it. They are folded carefully to avoid wrinkling and placed separately in a large plastic bag, leaving the balloon's mouth free.

The basket is prepared, which is made with flexible binding wire. A cube-shaped base is formed on which the cotton rag stuffing will be placed. According to information from Doña Angelina, the ideal material is T-shirts because they are pure cotton. Three wire rods of the same size are cut to make the legs of the basket, they are attached to the base of the cube, the end is bent with pliers, the stuffing is prepared, and it is secured with a piece of wire that is wrapped around one of the rods extending from the base, which are arranged in a tripod shape. As many baskets as balloons have been made are prepared, and they are stored separately since they will be placed inside the balloon at the moment the stuffing is ignited.

Finally, 3 to 5 torches are prepared that will be used to light a fire to warm the air inside the balloon. A stick is used, preferably one that is green, long enough, and a little bit of cotton rags tied at one end in the shape of a small ball is secured tightly with wire until it is firm so that there is no danger of it falling when inserting it into the balloon.

Balloon launch

A day before the party, the wicks of the torches and the wicks of the baskets are soaked with gas. They are left to drain all night so that they can expel the excess absorbed gas, because both the wicks of the torches and the wicks of the baskets must remain damp without dripping. The launch of the balloons takes place on September 29 in the inner courtyard beside the church, in front of the parish house. All the members of the Molina family help take the balloons from doña Angelina's house to her brother's car, the balloons are placed with utmost care and attention as they constitute the offering that the family presents to the patron saint and they transport them to the place where they will rise. In a box, they carry the matches, the torches, the baskets, and the blowers. Upon arrival, they find many spectators and volunteers who help inflate.

The weather conditions are decisive for lifting the balloons, as if it is raining, they cannot be elevated. Almost always on September 29 it rains because San Miguel is weepy. The same happens with the wind; if there is too much wind, the launch is not possible. The best times to launch the balloon are those periods when the winds are calm or have a light breeze, which usually occurs in the morning or in the afternoon.

In the procedure for launching the balloon, the participation of several young people, both men and women, is necessary, as many hands are needed to blow and a dozen blowers. A middle-aged man goes up

the roof of the priest's house with the smooth rod that must be well dried so that it does not weigh because it is a lot of time that the person would be up there holding it while it inflates. This is done when the balloon is large, when they are small it is done on a table. Insert one end of the rod into the ring of the balloon and hold the other end with both hands, it is necessary to go up to the roof because of the size of the balloon. From the people below, some help to hold the mouth, others to separate the walls of the balloon to facilitate the entrance of air and others begin to blow with the help of the blower. When they get tired, another volunteer takes their turn and this is how they take turns because they should not stop blowing until the balloon is sufficiently inflated. This is the precise moment to identify if the balloon has any fissure where air escapes and it is repaired by sticking a small piece of tissue paper of the same color.

A participant lights the wick of the torch and, with great care, inserts it into the balloon, ensuring it does not touch the ends because it could burn. When it is considered that the air is hot, the torch is taken out and extinguished with a damp cloth, to be reignited when the next balloon is ready. In the already prepared balloon, the basket containing the wadding is placed inside, the paper that borders the hoop is pierced, and the three wires of the basket are adjusted to this. The wadding is ignited with a match very slowly, and blowing continues. The person who is certain that the balloon is ready to be launched is the one up top, on the roof, who is holding it with the pole through the ring, because they identify the pressure of the balloon that wants to take off. Then, those who are blowing ask the one holding it: Are you pulling yet, do you feel it pulling? If the person holding it says it's ready, they let go of the pole and the balloon rises due to the action of the compressed hot air. It surpasses the walls of the parish. The family members say: Here is your offering San Miguel, it is for you, my Lord, for giving us another year. They applaud and shout. The same procedure continues

with all those who have been offered. From 2008 to 2011, 18 balloons were raised each year.

Incidents after the launch

In 2009, a balloon caught fire after getting snagged on a wire in the priest's house corridor. It was a tense moment as the priest was not home to open the door and take it out. Knowing it could cause greater damage, a boy set up a ladder to climb to the roof and reach the corridor but when he was halfway up the ladder, he remembered that the father had a fierce dog and asked: What is the dog's name so I can call it? But at that precise moment, the father arrived and we told him: Father! A balloon is burning in your backyard. And the father quickly went up. He left the door open but when he got to the backyard, the balloon had already burned without causing major damage. Doña Angelina commented that later, they joked about the incident with the balloon and the dog.

As the balloons go so far away, their father told them that, once, a balloon got stuck in an electric power line in Amatitlán, there was a short circuit and the town was left without power. When the workers searched for the cause of the blackout they found a balloon among the wires and the workers said: Ah! Petapa is in fair. They removed it and restored the electricity service.

It was reported that another balloon fell in Gerona, Guatemala, when a boy, who was playing in the yard of the farm his parents managed, saw something on the grass that looked like a colorful sheet with a small flame lit, and when he got closer, he became frightened. He ran to where his parents were, and his father told him it was a balloon, but he did not know the origin.

A miracle of Saint Michael the Archangel in the family

Doña Angelina recounts that an uncle, since childhood, had a cloud [cataract] in one eye and since that disease is irreversible, over time he could no longer see. The maternal grandmother, upon seeing that her son did not

he looked, went to the church and begged San Miguel to perform the miracle of restoring his sight and the uncle regained the vision of the damaged eye and lived to 98 years with his sight restored.

For the family, the eye situation represented a serious problem because at that time in the village there were no ophthalmologists, and the family considered it a lost cause. But thanks to the miracle of Saint Michael, the faith in this family grew stronger every day, which is why they spare no effort in making the balloons that are offered every year in September. In addition, for nine days they wake up very early to attend the dawn prayers of the rosary, which begin on the 21st and end on the 29th of September. From four in the morning, people are already praying at the altar of Saint Michael. And in the evenings, masses are held.

Apprenticeship of a nephew

According to information provided by Doña Angelina, of her father's children, only she learned how to make balloons. However, she has a nephew in the second degree of consanguinity who has already taken an interest in learning. Her nephew insisted on helping his aunt, but there was the issue that Doña Angelina only worked on balloons at night, after 9:00 PM, because she is so busy with her commitments at church that she doesn't have time to work on them during the day. Faced with her nephew's insistence, Doña Angelina told him that if he wanted to learn, he should come to her house at that time. The nephew would arrive at nine at night and observe the whole process. He wrote down everything Doña Angelina showed him, and, to the surprise of all the family members and especially his aunt, one day the nephew showed up with a folded package. It was the strips of tissue paper to make a balloon, but the nephew didn't dare mark the cut out of fear of ruining them. His very excited aunt suggested she cut half of it, and the other half was cut by the nephew as he already knew how to position the ruler and mark the line.

The nephew implemented a variation on the traditional method of making the balloon. He attached thin fringes made of the same material to the balloon to handle it without damaging it because it is too delicate and there is no way to grip something so large and round. The primary idea for the fringes came from other nephews of Doña Angelina, who suggested to her why not add some strips of paper, but Doña Angelina never placed them. She shared the idea of her other nephews with him, and he brought it to life, making it easier to handle the balloons and avoiding damaging and wrinkling them.

Final comment

The balloons of San Miguel Petapa represent the legacy that the Molina Santos family offers to Saint Michael the Archangel on his feast day, September 9, without any economic benefit as the family has never sold any balloons.

Balloons are popular crafts of material or ergological culture and can be created in various ways depending on the artist's creativity.

At the time of the research, only Doña Angelina and her nephew know how to make them. Even though each year when the balloons are flown, many people ask her to teach them and there is great enthusiasm to learn, the interest fades once the activity is over. Moreover, Doña Angelina would need a spacious place to teach the crafting process, and in her home, she does not have the conditions suitable for such learning. However, the nephew's learning ensures the continuity of this tradition in San Miguel Petapa, and it is hoped that the nephew will pass on the knowledge to others interested in learning.

Finally, the researcher, in charge of the Arts and Popular Crafts Area of the Folklore Studies Center at the University of San Carlos of Guatemala, through this publication, highlights and recognizes the life, work, and sacrifices of a Petapaneco artist, Don Juan

Molina Tatuaca, who was the heir and bearer of a tradition of popular material culture, the Chinese paper balloons, tangible and intangible heritage of San Miguel Petapa, offered to the patron saint, San Miguel Arcángel, and to his daughter, the heir and transmitter of the tradition, Doña María Angelina Molina Santos.

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The master artisan, doña María Angelina
Molina Santos.



Doña Angelina with the ream of Chinese paper.



The paste or 'yuquilla' used to glue the balloon pieces together



Doña Angelina in the process of spreading paste onto the pieces.



Detail of the process of gluing a piece following the outline or spine.



Kandy Carolina Muñoz Guerra takes paste to apply it to the edge of a strip, in the process of joining the pieces.

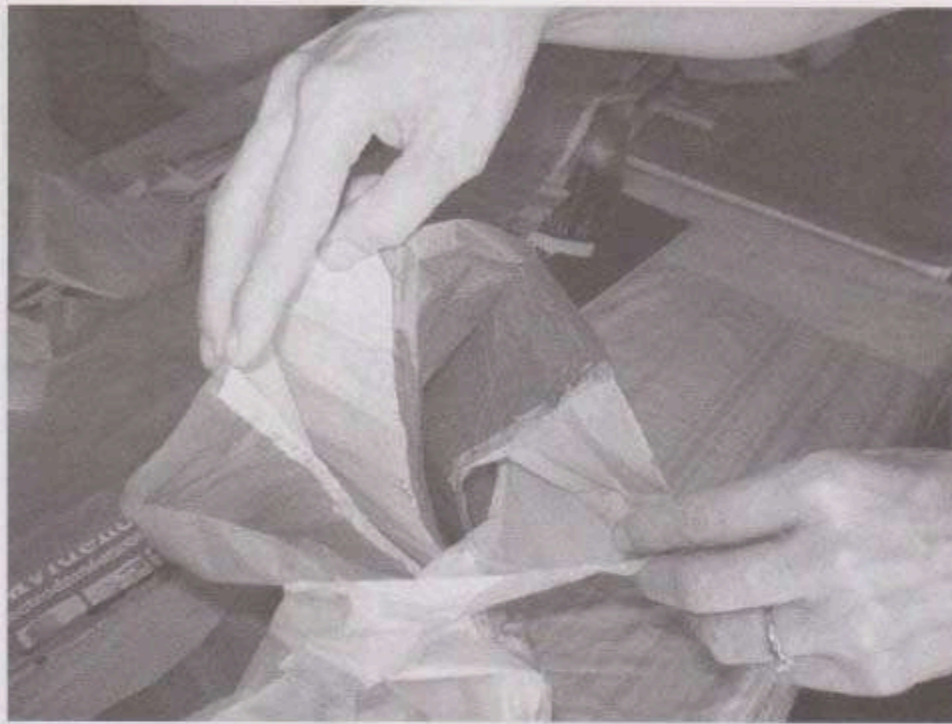


Arturo Francisco Matas Oria (†) cuts a strip of tissue paper.



The clothespins are used to hold the strips while the artisan cuts the strips.

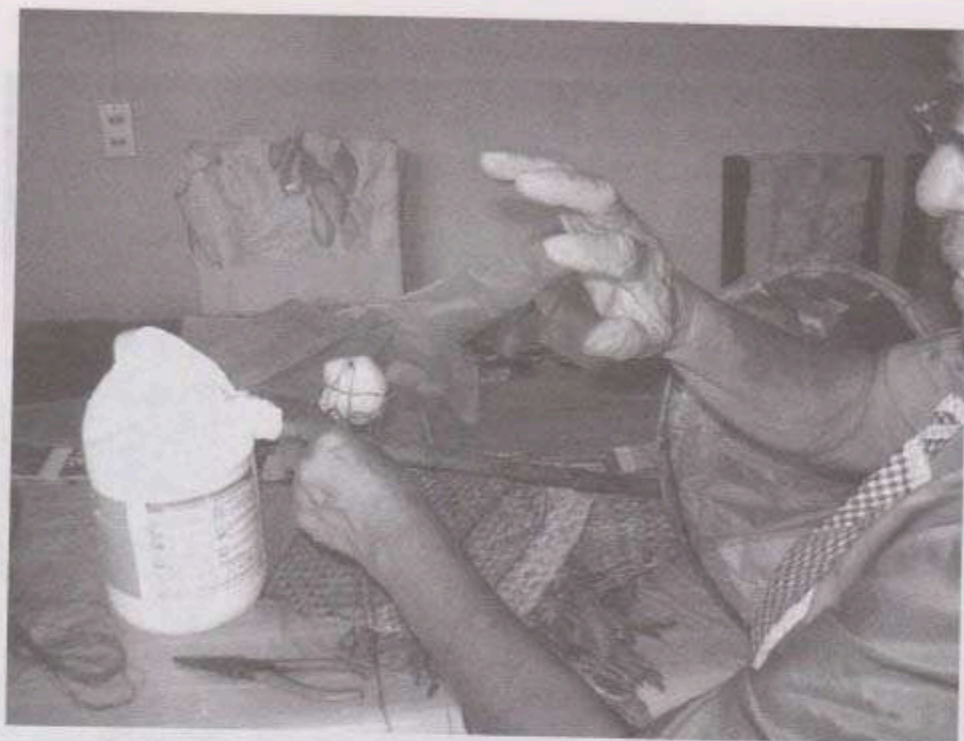
Balloons for Saint Michael the Archangel,
San Miguel Petapa, Guatemala





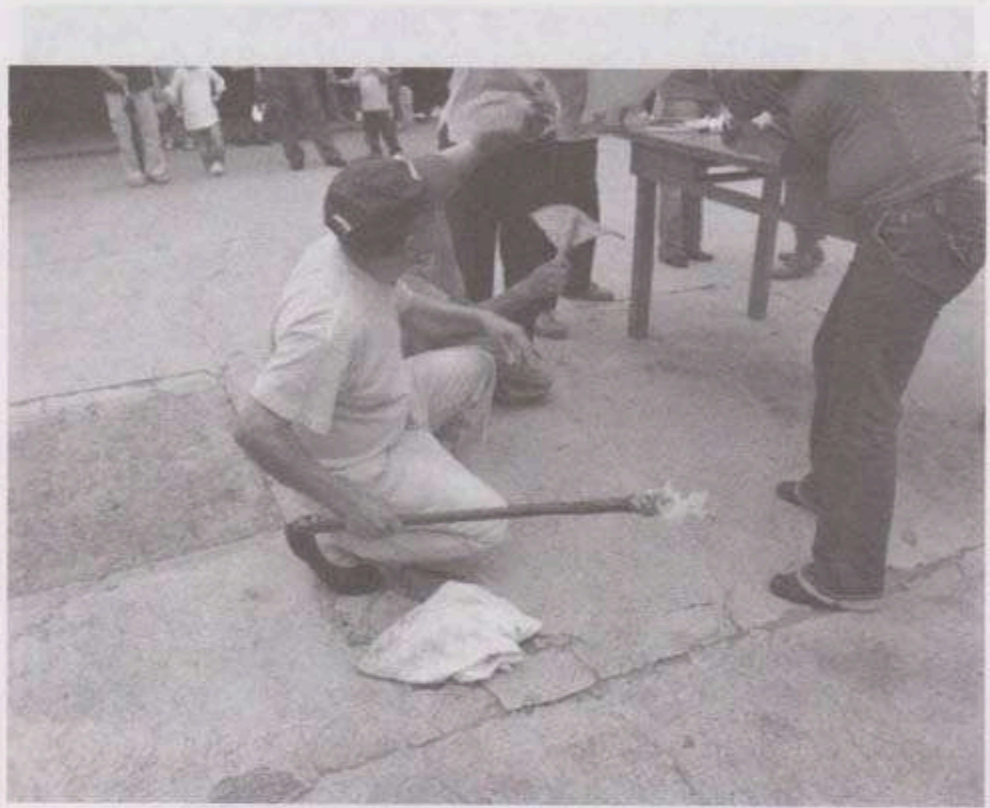
Balloons for Saint Michael the Archangel,
San Miguel Petapa, Guatemala





Don Wilfredo y sus hijos
trabajando en el taller

Balloons for Saint Michael the Archangel,
San Miguel Petapa, Guatemala





Balloons for Saint Michael the Archangel,
San Miguel Petapa, Guatemala





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